

## The Abrahamic Covenant: the Unconditional Promise of a Land and a People

### Genesis 12:1-9

Genesis 12:1-9: *“Now the LORD had said to Abram: “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, to a land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”*

*<sup>4</sup> So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people whom they had acquired in Haran, and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. <sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem, as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were then in the land.”*

*<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup> And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel, and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup> So Abram journeyed, going on still toward the South.”*

### Background Notes

As we begin our studies of the life of Abraham, we should recognize the importance of this biblical figure. Abraham is the only person in the Bible who is called “the friend of God.” He is called the friend of God in three different places in Scripture: 2 Chronicles 20, Isaiah 41, and James 2. James 2:23: *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. And he was called the friend of God.”*

Abraham is mentioned more than 70 times in the New Testament. Why is he so important? Verse 3 gives us the answer: *“I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* How are all the families of the earth blessed in Abraham? The answer is obvious! Abraham was the father of the Jewish people, and it was through the Jewish people that the Savior of mankind came. The Lord Jesus Christ was in the line of Abraham.

Joshua 24 tells us, *“Your fathers, including Terah, the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, dwelt on the other side of the River in old times; and they served other gods.”* So Abraham came out of a background of idolatry beyond the Euphrates River in the Mesopotamian Valley.

God called Abram from his home in Ur of the Chaldeans in ancient Mesopotamia, which is Iraq today. Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:2-4 says, *"The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you.' Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell."*

After Abram's father, Terah, died in Haran, Abram continued on to Canaan. Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Haran was at the top of the Fertile Crescent, where Turkey and Syria come together today. He lived first at Shechem (v6), then on a mountain between Bethel and Ai (v8), and then further south in the Negev. Notice at this point Abraham's name is Abram, and Sarah's name is Sarai. God eventually changed their names in Genesis 17. At that time God promised Abraham that he would be the "father of many."

God didn't call Abraham because he was a "good" or "godly" person. No! God called Abraham because He called him! That is, God called Abraham **according to His own sovereign and elective choice!** And that is the way God calls us as well. God does not save us according to some intrinsic or goodness or godliness in us - He saves us according to His sovereign grace and mercy!

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The preservation of the people of Israel is part of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham.

Why are the Jewish people still in existence today? They exist because of the unconditional covenant God made with Abraham. *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"* (v2-3).

Other ancient peoples have passed off the scene, but not the Jewish people! Other nations have tried to destroy the Jewish people, but they have been cursed instead. The Jewish people continue to this day. The miracle of the Jewish people is the result of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, which is first mentioned in Genesis 12.

The New Testament teaches that all believers are considered "children of Abraham." All those of faith are the *spiritual* descendants of Abraham. (See Galatians 3 and Romans 4.) However, the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant applies to all believers as the **spiritual** descendants of Abraham does **not** deny, or negate, or remove, or eliminate, or change the promises that God made to Abraham about his **biological** descendants, the Jewish people. The preservation of the people of Israel is part of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham.

## 2. The gift of the Land of Israel is part of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham.

God told Abraham to go to a land that He would show him (v1). What land was that? It's the land where Israel is located today (then called Canaan). The Lord appeared to Abraham and said, *"To your descendants I will give this land."* What land? Again, it is the land where Israel is located today. So the Jewish people of today have a **divine right** to the ancient land of Israel. This divine right does not give the Jewish people the right to gain land by unbiblical means, but they don't have to, because God will restore all the land to them when they return to Him. The gift of the land of Israel is part of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham.

"Unconditional" means that God did not place any conditions or stipulations on Abraham and his descendants regarding this covenant. God promised to keep His covenant regardless of whether Abraham and his descendants were being obedient or not. It is an **unconditional covenant**.

There is **nothing** in the Bible that invalidates the Abrahamic covenant, thus it is still valid and binding today. Romans 11 is a very important chapter in this connection. It informs us that, because of disobedience, the Jewish people have been **temporarily** set aside from the place of blessing. However, when the Jewish people return to the Lord (and they will), all the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant will be theirs, including the Land. The gift of the Land of Israel is part of God's unconditional covenant with Abraham and his descendants.

## Practical Applications

### 1. Let's have a faith that obeys like Abraham.

In verse 1 the Lord said to Abram: *"Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you."* That's quite a request, isn't it? Leave your country, your family, and your father's house! But *"Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him."*

From archeology, we know that Ur was highly developed and civilized. Abraham probably had a good job and a nice home. But in obedience to the call of God, Abraham and Sarah (let's not forget the faith of Sarah here!) left the good life in Ur and followed the call of God. In Hebrews 11:8 we read, *"By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."* That's an obedient faith!

Suppose God were to call you to a new area of service? Suppose it meant that you had to leave your homeland and the area where you are happily settled and content? Suppose it meant that from now on you would have to live a life of

sacrifice? Would you be willing to obey? Maybe God is calling you to a life of sacrificial service for Him. Do you have an obedient faith? Let's have a faith that obeys like Abraham.

## 2. Let's have a faith that *witnesses* like Abraham!

Abraham was not only told to leave his homeland in Ur - he was also told to be a blessing in the land of Canaan. That's the idea at the end of verse 2. Abram to be a blessing by witnessing for God in the land of Canaan. And that is exactly what Abraham did!

When Abraham arrived at Shechem, the first thing he did was build an altar at the terebinth or oak tree of Moreh. This place had probably been a Canaanite shrine, but Abraham fearlessly built an altar there as a witness for the one true God to the idolatrous Canaanites.

When he moved to the Bethel and Ai area, he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord (v8). The phrase "*called on the name of the Lord*" includes the idea of witnessing for the Lord.

What a difference we see between the life of Abraham and the people at the tower of Babel! They built their tower to make a name for *themselves* - but Abram built an altar and called on the *name of the Lord*. He wasn't looking to build a name for himself. Abraham not only had faith in God, he witnessed for God as well.

What about us? Do we have a faith that witnesses like Abraham? Are we witnesses for the Lord to our neighbors or the people at our job? Young people, is your life and speech a witness to your friends and teachers at your school or at your university?

Like Abraham, many of us work and live among primarily "pagan" people. It's not easy to be a witness for God in these circumstances! But, like Abraham, God will make you a blessing if you are a witness for Him. Let's have a faith that witnesses like Abraham!